

## An Appeal from a Downtown Dweller

Attitudes change. Collectively, and individually, we, as human beings, have a seemingly infinite capacity for learning, growing, and evolving in both thought and behavior. Smoking has descended from fashionable to foul, fannypacks have (thankfully) all but disappeared, and the “four-eyes” of yesteryear are the cool hipsters of today – particularly when their lenses don’t have any glass in them.

So why is it that for scads of suburbanites, who daily cram the streets of Hartford to earn a living, it is still *de rigueur* to make the city, and its resident “downtown dwellers,” the objects of their ridicule, scorn, and sneers? “You live in Hartford?! Where do you grocery shop?” Hahahaha. “Pretty dead on the weekends, huh?” Chortle, chortle. “What do you do with your car?” Snicker, snicker.

Look, I come from New York, so I am very familiar with big-city life, and, for certain, this ain’t it. But I have also lived in the suburbs, and I assure you this ain’t that either. Yes, West Hartford and Glastonbury are lovely: sylvan, well manicured, and handsome, but also fairly small, very tame, and largely homogeneous.

Not so in Hartford, where a diverse resident population is afforded much of the best that city life has to offer. Scores of fabulous restaurants line the easily walkable streets. Libations flow in urbane lounges; to the beat of rock, jazz, salsa, and hip-hop; as boisterous sports fans cheer on the Yankees, BoSox, Patriots, or Huskies; and where the cool eyeglass-wearing hipsters gather. Live theater of the highest caliber – Tony-award winning theater! – is offered nearly every day of the week. (After which we downtown dwellers happily avoid the frenetic race from the parking garage!) Sundays are as easily spent running along the grand Connecticut River as lazing in picturesque Bushnell Park as wandering the halls of the elegant Wadsworth Atheneum. I live in a building peopled by babies and senior citizens, families and singles, gays and straights, and persons of more shades of color than I can say. Our dog is welcome, our rooftop terrace is lively, our neighborhood is safe, and there is a true sense of community.

As a city, Hartford has some work to do. All cities do. But to get there, Hartford, and its residents, need support, encouragement, and faith. I am not from Connecticut, but I love living here, partly because it is just so darn pretty, but also because I have great reverence for the enlightened thinking, unfettered tolerance, abiding justness, and profound civility that is deep in the bones of New Englanders. For that reason I propose this: The next time you catch yourself ready to mock Hartford, try speaking kindly, and then behaving kindly, instead. Patronize the local storeowners, who are stoutly willing to invest in the future of our town. Visit the Science Museum, the XL Center, Front Street, and the Old State House. Above all, support the urban pioneers who are willing to make this town their home, and who, by doing so, carry the promise of a more vibrant, more artistic, more thriving, and more prosperous future for Hartford and for everyone who lives and works and visits here.

And for the record: I buy much of my food at farmer’s markets, including the year-round one at Billings Forge, or I drive to a supermarket, just like you. Sometimes the weekends are quiet, and sometimes they are bustling because of a sporting event or great activity on the riverfront or in Bushnell Park. My rent includes a parking spot in the garage right beneath my building.